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RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1677
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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 000906

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/RA, AND OES
STATE PASS TO AID
CAIRO FOR VIALA

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [PREL](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [JO](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: WATER POLLUTION INCIDENT TO CAST BLAME ON MINISTRY
OF WATER

REF: A. AMMAN 860
[1](#)B. AMMAN 508
[1](#)C. 08 AMMAN 3011
[1](#)D. 08 AMMAN 1639
[1](#)E. 08 AMMAN 409

Classified By: CDA Natalie E. Brown for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation (MWI) on March 13 suspended pumping water for two days from the King Abdullah Canal, which supplies Amman with one-third of its water needs, after detecting oil and sewage in the waterways. Jordanian authorities determined that the contamination originated from Israel and was possibly caused by flooding due to recent heavy rainfalls. Jordan discarded approximately 50,000 cubic meters of polluted water, cleaned the polluted part of the canal and refilled it with fresh water provided by Israel. Although no known health hazards resulted from the water contamination, the incident has generated severe criticism by lawmakers against MWI and Israel along with extensive newspaper coverage. MWI has defended Israel, noting that Israel compensated Jordan for the polluted water by providing over three times the amount of fresh water. The Jordanian Lower House formed a committee chaired by former Agriculture Minister Hashem Shboul to investigate water pollution in the King Abdullah Canal. Shboul indicated to Post that the committee has found no intentional wrongdoing by Israel and would likely blame the Jordanian MWI for failing to do its job. Shboul believes that Minister Abu Saud may be asked to step down. END SUMMARY.

Pollution Incident

[1](#)2. (U) MWI suspended on March 13, pumping water for two days from the King Abdullah Canal to the Zai Drinking Water Treatment Plant in Amman after detecting oil and sewage in the canal. Bordering Israel in the north, the 110-kilometer King Abdullah Canal has a capacity of 300,000 cubic meters and is considered a significant source of water for the country, providing the capital Amman with one-third of its drinking water. The quality of the water in the canal is dependent on the neighboring countries, as most of the water originates in Israel or Syria. MWI has speculated that floods caused by recent heavy rainfalls could have generated the pollution, explaining that valleys extending from the Golan Heights were the source of the pollution.

Water Compensation by Israel Outweighs Losses

13. (SBU) Jordan Valley Authority Secretary General Mousa Jamaani reported to the press on March 18 that Jordan discarded 50,000 cubic meters of polluted water and after cleaning up the polluted part of the canal, was refilling it with fresh water provided by Israel from Lake Tiberius. He elaborated that Israel compensated Jordan with 180,000 cubic meters of fresh water after the pollution event and will provide another 50,000-60,000 cubic meters of water from Lake Tiberius this summer as part of the compensation. He noted that the water received from Israel after the incident was much greater than that lost, and measures were taken to prevent further pollution. Jamaani also stated that Israel responded in a timely manner to contain the pollution in accordance with the Jordan-Israel peace treaty. NOTE: The press has highlighted that this is the second incident of polluted water coming from Israel. In 1998, water pumped from Lake Tiberius was contaminated with sewage and caused the Zai water treatment plant to shut down for an extended period of time. END NOTE.

Public Debate Results in Significant Media Coverage

14. (SBU) Due to the sensitivity and extent of the pollution, the incident has generated severe criticism by lawmakers against MWI, along with extensive newspaper coverage. Parliamentarians have accused MWI of insufficient or faulty water quality monitoring equipment. The Islamic Action Front (IAF) has demanded the dismissal of MWI Minister Raed Abu Saud, the MWI Secretary General, and Secretary General of the Jordan Valley Authority in the wake of what it called "the scandal brought about by the Zionist entity's act of polluting Jordanian waters." Abu Saud has defended Israel and the MWI water quality testing system, stating that his Ministry had the crisis under control from the beginning. He claimed the pollution was discovered due to MWI periodical lab tests of the King Abdullah Canal's water. The Minister further explained that water heading to the canal is monitored via 14 early detection stations, adding that reports about malfunctions at those stations were "untrue."

Parliamentary Committee to Blame Water Minister

15. (C) Jordan's Lower House formed on March 24, an ad-hoc committee chaired by former Agriculture Minister and parliamentarian Hashem Shboul to investigate water pollution in the King Abdullah Canal. During an April 14 meeting with Poloffs, MP Shboul noted the committee would issue its findings shortly. Shboul indicated that the release of polluted water into the canal was "surely not intentional" on the Israeli side. He appreciated that Jordan received generous amounts of water from Israel in compensation for the incident and that the technical cooperation between the two sides had ultimately worked as it was supposed to. Shboul went on to assign the blame to the Jordanian side, chiding Minister Abu Saud for his "shocking" lack of political sense in traveling to Turkey for the World Water Forum in the middle of the scandal. He said the committee was surprised to discover that the Minister had never visited key parts of Jordan's water infrastructure, including the canal where the polluted water was transmitted, and was largely ignorant of how Jordan's water system really worked on the ground. Shboul also noted that there is a successful joint Jordanian-Israeli committee which deals with the technical aspects of cross-border water issues, but Abu Saud failed to utilize it. His ultimate conclusion was that MWI "is not doing its job" and that Abu Saud may be asked to step down.

16. (C) COMMENT: While basic water quality monitoring in Jordan is relatively good, some of the blame for lax MWI responsiveness is probably justified. Although the MWI Minister may be a logical scapegoat, Abu Saud is an experienced hand at navigating political turbulence and his dismissal seems unlikely at this time. The fact that the Minister has been able to initiate a Red-Dead Jordan-only

project study with indigenous funding points to his clout within the current government (Ref A). END COMMENT.

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